

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BOGOTA 05684 201448Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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O 201356Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2147

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 5684

EXDIS

ARA FOR DEPY ASST SECY DEVINE

S/NM FOR MS FALCO

A/SY FOR DEPY ASST SECY DIKEOS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SNARN CO, CASC, ASEC
SUBJECT: AMB SANCHEZ AND THE SANTA MARTA AIRPLANE INCIDENT

REFERENCE: BOGOTA 5661, 5663

1. WE WERE PHONED SATURDAY NIGHT BY FORMER AMBASSADOR
PHILLIP SANCHEZ, WHO WAS CALLING FROM THE LAS VEGAS
OFFICE OF THE OWNER (JET AVIA, INC) OF THE AIR-HOSPITAL PLANE THAT
WAS DETAINED ALONG WITH ITS PASSENGERS AFTER TRYING TO
EVACUATE A SUSPECTED NARCOTICS TRAFFICKER FROM A SANTA MARTA
HOSPITAL WITHOUT PERMISSION. SANCHEZ INDICATED
THAT HE HAD BEEN ENGAGED BY THIS LAS VEGAS FIRM TO COME
TO BOGOTA TO SECURE THE RELEASE OF THE DETAINED AMERICANS
WHO HAD TRAVELLED HERE ABOARD THE AIRCRAFT. HE WANTED
TO KNOW WHETHER WE COULD ISSUE HIM AN AMERICAN PASSPORT
ON HIS ARRIVAL AT THE BOGOTA AIRPORT SINCE HE WOULD
NOT HAVE TIME TO OBTAIN ONE IN THE U.S. THROUGH THE
USUAL CHANNELS.

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2. I TOLD MR. SANCHEZ THAT I STRONGLY ADVISED AGAINST
HIS COMING TO BOGOTA. I SAID THAT I RECOGNIZE THAT
THE FIRM WAS FREE TO HIRE WHOMEVER IT WISHED AS A
REPRESENTATIVE OR ADVOCATE, BUT THAT I PERSONNALLY
FELT IT MIGHT FO THE DETAINED AMERICANS HERE MORE
HARM THAN GOOD IF HE WERE TO INTERVENE. I REMINDED

MR. SANCHEZ OF PRESIDENT LOPEZ' CONTINUED PERSONAL ANIMOSITY TOWARDS HIM AND I MENTIONED THAT HE HAD BEEN THE SUBJECT OF CRITICISM RECENTLY PUBLISHED IN THE LOCAL PRESS IN CONNECTION WITH THE CABRANES AFFAIR. I ADDED THAT THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE HERE WAS HIGHLY CHARGED WITH RESPECT TO NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING AND THE USG-GOC RELATIONS WERE IN A VERY DELICATE STATE WITH RESPECT TO THIS PROBLEM. I ARGUED THAT HIS INTERVENTION WAS UNFORTUNATELY LIKELY TO MAKE MATTERS MORE COMPLICATED, AT THE VERY LEAST. SANCHEZ SAID THAT HE WAS NOT GOING TO COME DOWN AS A DIPLOMAT BUT AS A PRIVATE PERSON. I SAID I UNDERSTOOD THIS BUT THAT IT DID NOT CHANGE THE CONTEXT OR ATMOSPHERE THAT I HAD DESCRIBED NOR WOULD IT IMPROVE PRESIDENT LOPEZ' REACTION TOWARDS HIS ROLE. MOREOVER, THERE WOULD STILL BE AMBIGUITY ABOUT HIS UNOFFICIAL STATUS IN THE EYES OF SOME COLOMBIANS, INCLUDING JOURNALISTS. I ADDED THAT I WAS GREATLY SURPRISED THAT HE WOULD CONSIDER COMING TO BOGOTA AT THIS TIME AFTER ALL THAT HAD HAPPENED IN THE PAST MONTH AND EARLIER. SANCHEZ COMMENTED THAT ALL THIS WAS NEWS TO HIM AND SAID HE HAD BEEN OUT OF TOUCH WITH RECENT DEVELOPMENTS. I URGED AGAIN THAT HE NOT INTERVENE IN THIS MATTER. I SAID MY COLLEAGUES AND I WERE TAKING THE CASE INVOLVING THE AIRCRAFT VERY SERIOUSLY, THAT WE RECOGNIZED IT WOULD BE COMPLICATED AND DIFFICULT

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BUT THAT WE WOULD DO ALL WE COULD TO ASSIST AND PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF THE DETAINED AMERICANS.

3. FOLLOWING THIS CONVERSATION WE WERE PHONED AGAIN BY THE LAS VEGAS FIRM AND INFORMED THAT SANCHEZ' PLANNED TRIP TO BOGOTA HAD BEEN CANCELLED. INSTEAD, A SPANISH-SPEAKING LAWYER IS BEING SENT. WE WERE TOLD MR. SANCHEZ IS GOING TO STANDBY IN LAS VEGAS AND RENDER EXPERT ADVICE ABOUT HOW TO HANDLE COLOMBIAN OFFICIALS. (I DO NOT HOWEVER RULE OUT POSSIBILITY THAT HE WILL TRAVEL TO BOGOTA AFTER ALL.)

4. COMMENT: IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT PRESIDENT LOPEZ WILL RAISE THE SANTA MARTA AIRPLANE AFFAIR IN HIS FORTHCOMING MEETING WITH MS. FALCO AND DR. BOURNE, CITING IT AS AN EXAMPLE, IN HIS VIEW, OF THE LONG AND POWERFUL ARM OF THE "US MAFIA". EVEN IF, AS SEEMS QUITE POSSIBLE, THE LAS VEGAS JET AVIA FIRM WAS INNOCENTLY DUPED BY CRIMINALS AIMING TO RESCUE A SUSPECTED TRAFFICKER FROM SANTA MARTA, THE PRESIDENT WILL REMAIN UNSHAKEN IN HIS BELIEF THAT THE "AMERICAN MAFIA" HAS RESOURCES,

DETERMINATION AND CAPABILITIES WITH WHICH THE GOC
CANNOT COPE, UNAIDED. INDEED, THE RECENT TRANSFER
OF THE DETAINED AMERICANS FROM SANTA MARTA TO
BOGOTA JAILS ALMOST CERTAINLY REFLECTS THE FEAR
OF GOC OFFICIALS HERE THAT THE "US MAFIAZ
MIGHT EVEN SECURE THE ILLEGAL RELEASE OF THE PLANE
AND ITS PASSENGERS THROUGH ENORMOUS BRIBES TO
COLOMBIAN OFFICIALS IN SANTA MARTA.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ARRESTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 20-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BOGOTA05684
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770219-0683
Format: TEL
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770641/aaaabjst.tel
Line Count: 125
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 405d827a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 77 BOGOTA 5661
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27-Jun-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2100451
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AMB SANCHEZ AND THE SANTA MARTA AIRPLANE INCIDENT
TAGS: SNAR, CASC, ASEC, CARR, CO, US, (SANCHEZ, PHILIP)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/405d827a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009